

workshop—each feels himself happiest there, where he can use his special gift, and labor in the calling assigned him by God.

How much more happy should we feel, how many more contented, truly gladsome hours might we enjoy in life, did we always think of this when, instead of seeking our happiness beneath us in lower enjoyments, or above us in ambitious straining after what stands too high for us, or by our side in things that do not concern us, we were to seek it in what lies before us and in us, in the true use of our gifts, in the cheerful performance of our duty, in the honest service of our Lord. This, indeed, is our common vocation, however modest our endowments and station in the world. Let each be in his own place and sphere a servant of God, an handmaid of the Lord.

Make straight the way of the Lord! That applies not only to the great forerunner, but also to an humble follower of the Lord; not only to pioneer spirits like an Elijah or a John, a Paul or a Luther, but to all who number themselves among the people of God. To prepare the way of the Lord in thine own heart and life by allowing His Word and Spirit to work on thee; in pious devotion and willing obedience, and courageously combating all that grieves His Spirit and degrades thy soul. To prepare the way of the Lord around thee also, by professing thy faith and letting the light of a God-fearing walk shine in thine own circle, while furthering what is good, and stemming evil when thou canst—that, dear Christian, is thy high and holy, thy beautiful and blessed Christian vocation. And in such service there are hours of joy to be tasted, hours of quiet devotion and hours of joyful work, hours of filial thankfulness and hours of triumphant victory over self and sin; hours of joy which no earthly lust gives us, which far outweigh all the abnegations and deprivations of the narrow way, which yield us a foretaste of heavenly joys, and let us experience what the hymn says:

"How blessed to be free from sin,
 Servant of Christ to be.
 Service of sin is slavery,
 In Christ is liberty."

The servant of God can also reap the fruit of his work.

2. *When he can see that his labor is not in vain in the Lord.* It was so with John the forerunner. Though a preacher in the wilderness, his voice died not away in empty air. His powerful preaching of repentance struck in among the people like a mass of rock plunged into the water, dashing high the waves and propelling the ripple-rings around in ever-widening circles. It was not from the immediate neighborhood alone that the people—rich and poor, scribes and soldiers, pharisees and publicans—streamed forth to hear his preaching and to receive his baptism. No; the souls of men were stirred even to Jerusalem, from whence came priests and Levites to ask: Who art thou, and what seekest thou? John might thus be satisfied with the results of his preaching—not for his own sake, as if it had been his aim to attain consideration among the people, and make a reputation in the land, like some ambitious sect-founder and party leader—no; but for that cause which was God's cause, for the Lord's sake, whose way he sought to prepare.

And might he not rejoice from the heart at such a popular movement? If once on a time his predecessor and brother-spirit, the prophet Elijah, in evil times complained despondingly in the wilderness: "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword, and I only am left;" if once the prophet Isaiah in sorrow cried to his people: "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" might not John rejoice before God that he remained no mere preacher in the wilderness; that his testimony found an echo in many hearts; that his people appeared to awake from the spiritual sleep of stupidity and ignorance into